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## CURRENT OPINION

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### **The Original Words of the Gospel**

"It is my profound conviction that before we can arrive at any estimate of the teaching of Jesus Christ we must have the exact words, as far as we can, that he spoke." Such is the opinion of Rev. E. S. Buchanan, M.A., B.Sc., expressed in an address at the Union Theological Seminary and published in the *London Expositor* for November, 1915. The lecturer sketches the work of Wycliffe, Tyndale, and Luther, showing how they helped to emancipate Europe from an ecclesiastical tyranny of the most despotic kind, but declares that we are face to face today with another problem which does not seem ever to have entered the heads of the Reformers. "The Word of God has been made into a dead legal code. Men's souls have been put under it; and their own aspirations, and their own instincts, and their own power of love and hate have been crushed by this unalterable code into which the Bible has been made." The belief that every word in the English Bible was inspired by the spirit of God, and the hard system of dogma that condemns to eternal torment every soul that does not believe in a vindictive God who has prepared an eternal torture for millions of his creatures could not be accepted with satisfaction by the writer. And the patient study of many years has convinced him that such acceptance is not necessary. For the discovery of old texts seems to prove conclusively that someone with "an ecclesiastical brain" went over the Gospel manuscripts as early as the second century and altered a great many verses to bring them into conformity with the schemes and ideals of the hierarchy which had already begun to develop. The old Spanish and Irish texts, written in Latin, are probably the oldest we have, and were carried westward from Rome along the routes of

commerce which were well defined in those early days. There are probably enough Spanish and Irish fragments extant in various texts to enable us to reconstruct in the main the form of Gospels which was used in Britain, in Gaul, and in Spain between the years 122 and 170. There are many examples in these old manuscripts of cancellations of the original text by the copyist and the substitution of other words. A number of these are given in detail, and one instance may be mentioned where in an old Latin-Irish manuscript the original words could be recovered. The words of the Lord's Prayer translated "Give us this day our daily bread" had been written over "Panem verbum Dei celestem da nobis hodie," or "Give us today for bread the Word of God." The writer believes this was the original form of the text, thus making the Lord's Prayer from beginning to end a prayer for spiritual blessings. And so we have been shaken forever out of our complacency that we have got absolutely every word of the Gospels fixed. We have still a search to make. There are thousands of documents which are lying in our libraries unpublished. "If there is any new light to be got, in God's name let us get it. To satisfy our own minds, to satisfy the minds of other men, we must have the ultimate truth."

### **Parallel Development of Religious Ideas**

That there has been a parallel development of ideas from original mental instincts in different religions, without historical connection, is the contention of Professor Mills in the *Asiatic Review* for November 15, 1915. It has long been taken for granted that the existence of the same ideas in Jewish Christianity and in the Avesta, as well as in the Veda, can be accounted for by the

mutual exchange of ideas which took place between these peoples when the Persians overwhelmed the Jewish nation politically. But while their mutual religious influence upon one another must have been considerable, there was something more. It is not probable that these two most memorable religions should have harmonized so fully as they did without some common source of their mutual ideas. That source lay in the original instincts of the human being. Man was created with the germs of these ideas within him, and they have, in due course, come out through this parallel development which was inexorable in the forces behind it and within it. The ideas could not have been kept back. No human tribes have been utterly bereft of ideas such as Truth, Love, Rule, Toil, Success, and Heaven. Wherever men have breathed the breath of earth they have had the seeds of these things in them. Christians have this hope pressed upon them first of all from the analogies between the Avesta and the Bible. If the same thoughts appear, then, in those majestic two, *sometimes* without any borrowing at all one from the other, then the same thoughts must be common to all mankind above a certain grade. "The same essential instincts which have saved us from barbarism through our Jewish-Christian and Zarathustrian faith have saved millions who never heard of Jew or Christ or the Prophet Iranian or Arab."

#### **The World's Need of Men**

"What is the greatest need of our times for the betterment of Christian society?" asks Cardinal Gibbons in a Christmas message to the readers of *The Independent*, published in the issue of December 20, 1915. His answer is that it is not churches, nor schools, nor hospitals and sanitariums, nor majestic and colossal statehouses for our legislative bodies that are most needed, though these all have their place and value. The call of the times is for sturdy Christian

men and women endowed with the courage of their convictions. "We need men who are controlled by conscience rather than by expediency, men who are guided by principle rather than by popularity, men who are influenced by a sense of duty and not by self-interest, who are swayed by a spirit of patriotism rather than by a desire of political preferment. Above all, we need men of strong Christian faith who are prepared to uphold their religious convictions in the face of obloquy and popular prejudice. In a word, we need men and women of upright Christian character." But this fidelity to religious and moral principles requires a peculiar heroism; and the man who calmly fulfils a duty in the face of hostile public opinion displays a higher courage than the soldier who captures cities. Such a man, who obeys his conscience, has but one master, and that master is God. For this reason the writer is hopeful in regard to the permanence of the republic of the United States. He bases his belief on the genius and good sense of our public men, the wisdom of our legislatures, and on the patriotism of our people at large. This belief is strengthened by the fact that we are a religious nation. And though we may differ in faith "we stand united upon the common ground of charity and benevolence and of good will to all men."

#### **Popular Interpretation**

A timely article under the foregoing caption appears in the October, 1915, issue of *The Interpreter*, from the pen of Rev. G. A. Tait, M.A. He declares that in the days when theories of verbal or mechanical inspiration of the Bible held sway, no one but the free lance dared to challenge the accepted theories, and when men found inconsistencies of statement they for the most part kept their difficulties to themselves. But we have traveled far since then, in methods and in temper, to a more healthy position, involving the recognition that anything

worth appreciating is always worth investigating, and that while it is the church's duty to teach, it is also her privilege to learn. There is a temptation to many reverent minds to shrink from the difficulties and disquiet arising from modern criticism, but where the qualified Christian interpreter hesitates, less reverent and ill-qualified interpreters rush into the field with their false interpretations and guesses and deceive the multitude. For the popular mind tends to jump to the conclusion that the bolder the statement may be and the more startling its terms the more likely it is to be true. One of the means the writer urges in attempting to popularize the received results of modern criticism is to insure an output of simple constructive teaching through the most widely circulated papers, particularly the Sunday ones. The editors of the religious columns should be induced to substitute good, solid teaching of an uncontroversial type for the trite phrases and well-worn quotations that are commonly employed. Then, too, personal or viva-voce interpretation, though more difficult than mere criticism, may be made a very potent influence. But success in this direction requires special tact and skill. A bond of sympathy must be created between the teacher and his hearers, and for this the teacher not only must know himself but must also know his hearers. And the hearers must have confidence in the teacher, who must give vital instruction and not simply try to amuse. Again, the disposition of men to believe all or nothing has to be met. There is a temptation to shelter behind difficulties in a system, ignoring the fact that Christianity was, and is, first and foremost a life. We must teach them to distinguish between faith and belief. We do not have faith in Christ because we believe in miracles, but we believe in a divine Master who not only *taught* the truth, but who *was* the truth—God revealed to men in the only possible way which men could

understand. Then miracle as a whole, not the particular record of a particular miracle, becomes quite a different matter.

The writer concludes with the hope that someone with the necessary experience and knowledge may come forward as a popular interpreter of Scripture—not in the parochial pulpit, which is not the most fitting place for critical questions, but amidst the throng of men, hard-headed yet often very soft-hearted, for whom, after all, Christ lived and died, and whom now, as then, he calls to his service and his kingdom.

### **Through Good Will to Peace**

"Neither national security nor international peace can be insured by direct efforts. Military armaments will not produce them. Hague tribunals, arbitration treaties, and peace propaganda are very subordinate if not wholly ineffective means of attaining them." In these words Dr. Edward T. Devine begins an able editorial in the *Survey* of December 18, 1915. Continuing, he declares that peace is a by-product of rational social relations and conditions, and proceeds to discuss three conditions of national security and international peace which are fundamental.

Social religion is the first of these conditions. "Religion has remained personal, provincial, class-conscious. It must become social, universal, race-conscious. It has been conventional, dogmatic, ecclesiastical. It must become unconventional, alive, persuasive, human. It has been associated with forms of worship, with creeds and anthems, with sacred books and symbols, with priests and ministers, with solemn rituals of baptism and burial. It must be associated with life, with every consecration to high purpose, with the sayings and doings of laymen, with secular books and songs, with the phrases of ordinary speech, with character and conduct." Religion must be brought to bear upon the daily conduct of business, the

industrial wage contract, the class conflicts, and the even worse class indifferences of society, showing their incongruity with Christianity, before we can expect men to condemn war. "Lissauer's hymn of hate, with all its ferocity, is relatively a symptom of health and brotherly affection, when compared with some of the evidences of callous neglect, of cold-blooded exploitation of fellow-men, of inhumanity and injustice, revealed in any modern nation by candid and courageous investigation." The one who exploits and the one who hates are both irreligious, whatever their nominal religion, and must turn squarely about in their tracks. They have no good will and are obstacles to peace. Social education is a second essential condition of security and peace. And one function of this should be to give people an accurate, sympathetic understanding of other people—not merely immediate associates and neighbors, but people of all nations with whom we have social and economic relations. This will make possible an avoidance of those antagonisms and conflicts which arise from misunderstanding. A social organization of industry, which is a fruit of education and religion, may be regarded as the third essential condition of security and stable peace. Events in Europe have shown that, in a great crisis, industrial organization on the basis of individual profit has broken down and the government has had to assume control. This may point the way toward an industrial system consistent with a social religion and with social brotherhood. "If we see that there is some test of the usefulness of an enterprise other than its financial solvency, that large profits are no guaranty of large social benefits, that there is no necessary connection between pecuniary interest of large investors and the public interest, we shall be ready at least to consider with open minds any sincere proposals for reconciling industry with public welfare."

And so religious, educational, and industrial adjustments are to determine whether we are to have international good will and peace. We cannot have the latter without the former. Social reform or a persistence of barbarism are our alternatives.

### **The War and the Religious Outlook**

Denis Crane, of London, reports in the *Homiletic Review* for January, 1916, a very interesting interview with Mr. Harold Begbie, author of *Twice Born Men*. Mr. Begbie has achieved a reputation as a shrewd observer of present-day religious tendencies, and his observations are especially valuable because of his freedom from ecclesiastical or conventional restraint. He points out that dogmatic religion was dying before the war. The world no longer had any certainties. Men could not say whether they believed in God or not. Now, as a result of the war, many thousands of people of all classes have discovered true happiness through self-sacrificing service and devotion to others; and their warm, living experience gives a positiveness to their religious affirmations which is far more vital and real than mere dogmatic statement. This new spirit of devotion to the service of humanity, Mr. Begbie thinks, will be the main inspiration of the new State which is emerging from the war—very largely a socialistic State. Instead of an economic socialism there will be a spiritual socialism, and it is in this spiritual socialism that he sees the greatest triumph of Christianity. He thinks that the churches as we now know them will cease to exist, for no form of ritual known at present will satisfy the future realistic religious feelings of mankind. "Humanity is being born again, and the churches also will have to be reborn." The church will not be needed as a conservator of religious truth. Religious truth, felt in the soul, needs no other embodiment than service to mankind. He thinks it is not fair to say that Christianity

has failed. Rather, it has not been tried. If there had been any big body of Christians in the belligerent countries war would have been impossible. People who express the greatest horror of it overlook the fact that it is not nearly so horrible as our whole commercial system. "The horrors that come from sweating and drinking and prostitution are infinitely worse; they not only slay greater numbers, but slay them in a way that it is awful to think of. Commercialism is a greater enemy of God and man than war." He has a feeling that we are approaching a period in human history more momentous than any which has gone before; one in which it is possible that there may be signs in heaven. He is satisfied that men have seen visions in France and also elsewhere, and believes in the story of the angels at Mons. He believes that all the atheism in the world has come as a protest against the tyrannous and stupid attempt to dogmatize about God. This war is teaching us the true meaning of religion—self-sacrifice, devotion, service. "From this will surely come the passion of religion—love of beauty and goodness, infinite desire for immortality, a divine curiosity concerning God."

### **The President and the Rural Church**

The recent Country Life Conference, at Columbus, Ohio, which was held in connection with the annual meeting of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, was honored by the presence of President Wilson, who delivered a notable address on the "Rural Church," which is published in full in the *Standard* of December 25, 1915. In recent years our cities are tending to draw the vitality from the country, and the problem of revitalizing the countryside now confronts us. Some progress has been made in the direction of utilizing the school-house as a social center, all of which is commendable, but the most vital social center should be the church itself. The com-

munity should be made to realize that the congregation, and particularly the pastor, is interested in everything pertaining to the welfare of the community. "It seems to me that the country pastor has an unparalleled opportunity to be a county leader; to make everybody realize that he, as the representative of Christ, believes himself related to everything human that has as its object the uplift and construction and inspiration of the community for the betterment of any of its conditions." Such an attitude, especially if backed up by the church officials, will give the church a dominating influence in the community such as it has lost for the time being and which we must find means to regain. Not that the church should run the community—that is not desirable; but the church should show that the spirit of Christianity is the spirit of assistance, of counsel, of vitalization, of intensive effort in everything that affects the lives of men, women, and children. The church must be reminded that it is put into this world, not only to save the individual soul, but to save society also. Society is to be saved by the instrumentality of Christianity in this world. "Legislation cannot save society. Legislation cannot even rectify society. A law that will work is merely a summing up in legislative form of the moral judgment that the community has already reached." Our wills have to be regenerated and our purposes rectified before we are in a position to enact laws that record those moral achievements; and that is the primary business of the Christian church. The great proof of Christianity is written in the biography of the saints, not merely those whom the world has labeled saints, but the people whose individual lives have been transformed by Christianity, which is the only force in the world that actually does transform life. The church is the only embodiment of the things that are entirely unselfish—the principles of self-sacrifice and devotion. "Surely this

is the instrumentality by which rural communities may be transformed and led to the things that are great; and surely there is nothing in the rural community in which the church ought not to be the leader and in which it ought not to be the vital and actual center."

### **Liberal Judaism and Christian Faith**

"The orthodox Judaism of the traditional type by no means holds undisputed sway," writes Rev. W. J. Sparrow Simpson in an article in the *Quarterly Review* of October, 1915. It is true that conservatism has its eminent teachers, like Dr. Friedländer, who is "even more orthodox than Maimonides"; and there is the Zionist movement, which is a national movement thoroughly in line with the strictly orthodox conception of Judaism. But a school of liberal Judaism has grown up, which, in the opinion of one of its ablest advocates, Mr. Claude Montefiore, is not derived from conservative Judaism by a process of subtraction, but is a separate and organic whole. He holds that "the Golden Age, the Messianic Era, and the Kingdom of God are doctrines which Judaism cannot relinquish, and which, with whatever changes of form and manner, it must still continue to cherish and to teach," although he does not seem to think that the doctrine of a personal Messiah necessarily need be retained. Liberal Judaism is strongly opposed to the nationalist or Zionist movement; for it believes in a Judaism universal, both in doctrine and in form. Just as Buddhism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism have adherents of many races, and by this very fact have shown their universality, so must it ultimately be with Judaism. "But this attempt to universalize Judaism by the elimination of its historic exclusive-

ness and by the reduction of the religion to the principles of Unitarianism is a revolution of the first magnitude, in which it would seem that all that can be distinctively termed historical Judaism disappears."

A significant feature of liberal Judaism is its movement in favor of the study of the New Testament by the Jews. Mr. Montefiore has written a *Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, maintaining "that it is of great importance for Jews to understand and appreciate aright the life and teaching of Jesus." An answer to the question, What should be the place of the New Testament in Jewish eyes and for the Jewish religion? seems to him one of the most important duties which lie before liberal Judaism. Of course he makes it clear that his point of view is frankly that of a Jew, that is, of one who stands outside every form and phase of Christianity. The problem of Christ's Person is deliberately evaded. One of the most discouraging features of modern Judaism is the absence of the conception of mediation. Dr. Simpson thinks that "this unconsciousness of the need of mediation affects profoundly the Jewish attitude toward Christianity. A religion which is essentially a religion of mediation can scarcely appeal where the need of mediation is as yet unfelt." It naturally follows from this attitude toward mediation that the religious conceptions of St. Paul should be severely criticized and this has been done by Mr. Montefiore in his book, *Judaism and St. Paul*. Undoubtedly modern Judaism is showing much interest in Christian ideas, and, "while we may not feel that they justify optimistic conclusions as to the probabilities of reconciliation, they contain very much of the deepest interest to those who hope for the restoration of Israel."